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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [MCAP](#) [IZ](#) [IT](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ/ITALIAN TROOP DEPLOYMENT: PARLIAMENT EXTENDS FUNDING THROUGH DECEMBER

REF: A. ROME 902

[B.](#) ROME 1635

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C Jonathan Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶](#)1. (U) Summary. On July 27, the Italian Parliament extended funding for Italy's mission in Iraq to December 31, 2005, by a wide majority. With the exception of the Union of Democrats for Europe (UDEUR), the opposition voted against. Wide differences of opinion have emerged within the opposition, ranging from Communist/Green support for immediate Italian withdrawal from Iraq to mainstream parties, (Democrats of the Left, Daisy) support for gradual withdrawal and recognition of a UN mandate through 2005. Center-left leader Prodi said after the vote that if the center-left wins the elections in 2006, he will withdraw Italy's troops. His remarks drew immediate criticism from PM Berlusconi, DPM/FM Fini, Government MPs, and Chief of Defense Staff Di Paola. End summary.

[¶](#)2. (U) On July 27, the Italian Senate approved the Government decree extending funds for Italy's humanitarian mission (troop deployment) in Iraq for another six months to December 31, 2005. There were 150 ayes, 92 nays, and two abstentions. The Chamber of Deputies approved the same decree on July 21, with 283 ayes, 207 nays, and three abstentions. The decree is now law. The full center-right governing coalition voted in favor in both Houses of Parliament, while most of the left opposed the decree, with the exception of Clemente Mastella's Union of Democrats for Europe (UDEUR). (Note: UDEUR had already broken ranks and voted with the majority parties on the previous extension of funds to June 30, 2005. End note.)

[¶](#)3. (U) Debate over the decree revealed increasing differences of opinion within the center-left opposition. Representing the mainstream sectors of the left, Piero Fassino, leader of the largest opposition party, the Democrats of the Left (DS), and Francesco Rutelli, leader of the smaller Daisy Party, called for a gradual exit strategy within a multilateral context and a clear definition of Italy's commitments needed to "concur with the completion of the process of transition" in Iraq. Communist Renewal (RC), the Greens, and the Italian Communists (PdCI), who have always opposed the Italian deployment, continued to call for the immediate withdrawal of Italian troops.

[¶](#)4. (U) In an effort to paper over these differences, center-left leader and former EC President Romano Prodi said July 29 that if the center-left won next year's elections, Italy's 3,300 troops would be "withdrawn as an occupying contingent because our task will be to help in the reconstruction of the country." His remarks drew immediate criticism from PM Silvio Berlusconi, DPM/FM Gianfranco Fini and other government MPs, who accused Prodi of misrepresenting the nature of the Italian mission and encouraging terrorist attacks on Italy and on Italian troops in Iraq. Forza Italia's spokesman said that Prodi's statement was an "invitation for terrorists to go to town." Speaking in Baghdad July 31, Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola was cited in the press as trying to reassure the troops that they had, and will continue to have, the "Government's strong support," whatever the outcome of the elections.

[¶](#)5. (C) Comment. The next Government decree on Iraq funding, expected to occur in January 2006 -- a few months before national elections -- is likely to be more politically charged. Italy's military presence in Iraq remains deeply unpopular, and Berlusconi will need to demonstrate that the end is in sight and that a gradual drawdown is possible to continue to secure the support of his center-right coalition members. With the elections in mind, Berlusconi has already announced that Italy will withdraw approximately 300 troops this fall (reftels). We do not expect Berlusconi to make any other troop reductions before the end of the year.

[¶](#)6. (C) Comment continued. Prodi is the most likely candidate to lead a center-left government should the center-left win next spring's elections. Although he has refrained from announcing a timetable for withdrawal, he

would be under pressure to appease the more extreme sectors of his coalition (RC, PdCI, and the Greens) by withdrawing quickly. Should Italy suffer a terrorist attack before the elections, Prodi could suffer a reverse Zapatero effect -- i.e., electoral wrath rather than support.

KILNER

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